

LIFE  
5 NOV 1971

Approved For Release 2004/11/01 : CIA-RDP88-01350R000200750006-6

F-Sidey, Hugh  
Johnson, Lyndon B.  
Sec. 4.01.2 The Vault  
age Point

# Some pages not in L.B.J.'s book

## THE PRESIDENCY

BY HUGH SIDEY

There are some pages missing from the considerably sanitized story of Lyndon Johnson as he tells it in his new book, *The Vantage Point*. It is too bad. A few people around this city have them—on yellowing copy paper tucked away in dusty files, the notes from hours of talk with one of the most forceful, sulfurous political men ever to preside over the Republic. My own collection overflows my files:

He never liked large electronic press conferences. "Why do you want those big television conferences with everybody popping up like ducks, and Sarah McClendon screaming at me? I look Sarah in the eye, then I go right by her, just to show her who's running the thing." When a local newscaster complained about seating at a briefing, Johnson let fly: "We were in the projection room and there he was sitting in my seat, the one I use for movies. If that little pissant can't be comfortable in the President's chair, what do you have to do for him?"

One night Johnson was recalling his favorite speeches: "I have two favorite speeches: the one I gave in New Orleans [the 1964 civil rights appeal] and . . . and . . ." He peered at Press Secretary George Reedy. "What was that other one day before yesterday, George, when I was healing the wounds again?"

His reading, as he reported, was rather unusual. "I get a black book for my night reading with all the hot tax cases that they want the President to know about. You'd be amazed at the men in that book. Big men, lawyers, corporation presidents who have never paid income tax."

When Vietnam began to weigh heavily on Johnson, he sought comfort in history. "I walk through the White House and I think about Lincoln walking through the same corridors. I remember when Churchill came here and stayed in the White House. He used to wear Mother Hubbard pajamas and wake up Roosevelt at 2 or 3 in the morning to tell him how to run the war. I may not be so bad off after all."

Johnson had a love-hate relationship with the press. "I just want you [the press] to do your duty and don't put any damned lies in it, and no propaganda. Then if you

want to, you can turn to the editorial page and say about me, 'This man is a scavenger and the son of a bitch doesn't belong in public office. . . .' I remember waking up one day and I turned on NBC, and there was a fellow standing with the big presidential seal and he was saying that big, black Cadillacs had been rolling up to the White House all day, and he talked about emergency and crisis. Well, I heard that and I thought, 'By God, we're at war and I've forgotten it.' I called George [Reedy] at home and he was taking a nap and I said, 'George, what in hell are you doing taking a nap when the country's blowing up?'"

One of the things that really bothered Johnson was the suggestion that he was a multimillionaire—which, of course, he was. "They say I'm the richest President, but that's just not true. I'm worth a quarter of a million. I sat here with Jack Kennedy and his old man, and they talked about oil and gas interests he owned, and they said that if he had to sell them he would lose \$9 million. So he kept them, and he was making oil and gas rates all the time." When dissent started in the United States over the Vietnam war, Johnson had his own special answer. "I read that there has never been a President who had to contend with a major war abroad and a major rebellion at home. That's 100% wrong. There never was a President with a major war who didn't have a rebellion. Washington had one-third of the country against him. Lincoln was sure he wouldn't be reelected. Roosevelt was shooting zoot-suiters on the West Coast."

As 1968 approached, L.B.J. didn't seem so sure that he wouldn't run. In fact, he occasionally looked over the possible opposition: "I see Romney had a little slip of the tongue. Said he was brainwashed in Vietnam. All I can say is, God help him if Kosygin ever gets him behind the out-house."

Johnson had varying assessments of the Russians. One was: "Eisenhower said, 'Don't trust the Communists on anything.' I agree. Khrushchev was stupid to put those missiles in Cuba. This Kosygin is cold and there, but if he had, he wouldn't be stupid

enough to take them out. The Russians always talk tough at first, but as each hour passes, they warm up."

In his last months in office, Johnson's eyes bothered him and he ordered a new light for his bedroom. "Lady Bird came back and saw it and said, 'My goodness, Lyndon, that's hideous. You can't have that here.' And I said, 'You've got 39 rooms in this place that you can fix up the way you want to, but by God I'm going to have this one room the way I want it. I've got that light and it looks like a circus in there.'"

L.B.J. had a deep respect and affection for Nelson Rockefeller, indeed for the whole Rockefeller family. Once he said: "Rocky would write a ticket that would make 95% of the Republicans come around. If they were all like him, they'd beat us. That old man [John D. Rockefeller] up in heaven—or wherever he may be—must be awfully proud of all his boys. Every one of them's been a public servant."

In those last days when he looked back, Johnson sometimes felt bitter. "I could have used my muscle around this town and purged all those Kennedy men. Instead, I tried to keep a team together. But sometimes I'd call a play around end, and they'd run it around the other end. I'd call for a pass and they'd kick. The spectators and the players were against me."

There was one time when he said nothing. He had taken himself out of presidential contention in 1968. He had halted the bombing in North Vietnam and leveled off the troop build-up. He was looking toward retirement. When he learned about Bobby Kennedy's death, he went to work with little show of emotion. But he carried a transistor radio to his desk. Over the radio came a replay of a reporter's short interview just before Kennedy was shot. Johnson stopped work. His head slumped way down between his knees as he listened, so low that those in front of the desk could barely see him. When it was over, he snapped the radio off, rose from his chair a stricken man, walked out of the French doors into the Rose Garden and stood there alone, silent.

Approved For Release 2004/11/01 : CIA-RDP88-01350R000200750006-6